

Who is Volunteering Today? Tapping into New Resources.

Volunteers vote with their feet.

Jackie Jordan-Davis

Every volunteer manager can benefit from knowing some key sources of volunteers for their organization. Innovative and effective recruitment is dependent upon this knowledge. Boards can also use this information to build committees and find people with specific skills. This chapter will discuss some of the emerging volunteer sources and offer suggestions on how you may want to use this information. Chapter five will continue the discussion with general ideas on volunteer recruitment.

This chapter will examine four groups of volunteers that are emerging as a growing segment of the population for potential volunteers: seniors, students, corporate volunteers and culturally diverse groups. These groups present new challenges to volunteer position parameters and recruitment techniques as well as motivational and commitment aspects of volunteering. Suggestions on utilizing this information are made at the conclusion of each of the discussions. Again, you will want to use this information as you see fit within your particular organization and community. A worksheet is provided to help you focus on some of the issues and ideas this discussion may trigger.

Seniors

Senior citizens are one of the largest growing segments of population today. Consider this data from Independent Sector¹²:

Average life expectancy has increased by 60% in this century . . . from 47 years to 75 years.

The number of seniors is projected to double by the year 2025.

There are currently 30 million persons in the age group of seniors most likely to volunteer (60-75 yrs).

Research suggests that older people want to be productive and that they are often not as active and productive as they would like to be. Yet it may be surprising to learn that older people seem to be less likely to volunteer than other adults. It is even more surprising to learn the major reason many older people give for not volunteering--no one asked them!

First, let's consider some of the reasons Independent Sector found many seniors give for volunteering:

It is important to help others;

I feel compassion toward people in need;

I can do something to help a cause that is important to me;

I thought I would enjoy the work;

I feel needed when I volunteer.

The data also indicates that seniors are less likely to volunteer for arts and cultural groups (13%) than for religious organizations (66%), health organizations (25%), or informal volunteering (37%) around the neighborhood. This creates an even greater challenge to design fulfilling positions for this group of people in our arts and cultural arena.

Variables affecting senior volunteer

Even though age is the main criteria used to define “seniors,” there are other variables that affect their ability and desire to volunteer. One major variable is their state of physical and mental health. Some cannot drive or see clearly which limits both their ability to get to the job and the jobs they are able to do. Others have limited time spans they can be away from medical equipment or medications. Sensitivity to these issues is helpful when interviewing a prospective senior volunteer. Often they are not as open to explaining their health problems due to a sense of pride or fear of rejection. Creativity and good communication are key elements in an effective recruitment and placement program for seniors.

Suggestions for
using the senior
volunteer

Use the following suggestions as a springboard for your own brainstorming on fitting seniors into your volunteer program effectively.

- ❖ Since seniors bring such a wealth of experience and knowledge to the job, design positions that utilize these attributes and validate the volunteer.
- ❖ Even though most seniors have “more free time,” be considerate of time issues. Many can only volunteer a few hours a week, or a few days a month due to health or other “retirement” commitments. Be flexible in creating different time requirement positions.
- ❖ Seniors make great mentors and if carefully paired, work well with youth.
- ❖ Consider the growing trend of asking seniors to work *pro bono* as a professional consultant to your organization. Retired lawyers,

Statement of Anita Currey, age 82

“It is a pleasure to say that I am now a trained docent at the Western Heritage Museum. One afternoon a week I preside over the Coming of Age exhibit. If visitors arrive without a tour guide, then I will act as guide and follow them through the museum to answer their questions or point out some interesting things they may have missed.

This is where age and long association with many and various types of people come in handy...Some are railroad bluffs, some history buffs, but it is great talking to all of them.”

*Independent Sector
Senior Citizens as Volunteers*

accountants, and other professionals may be more inclined to take this type of position.

- ❖ Many seniors need more social contacts and volunteering can be a great way to provide more social time. Seniors enjoy social events and feeling part of the organization's volunteer family.
- ❖ Seniors tend to stay in volunteer positions longer. Keep this in mind when creating positions and be sure and communicate time expectation up front.

Five Quick Tips to Make It Easier for Senior Volunteers to Serve in Your Program

(Taken from March 1999 issue of Connecting the Points, published by the Points of Light Institute.)

Consider the practical barriers that might stand between senior volunteers and your program.

- ❑ *Transportation issues can prevent many volunteers, senior or otherwise, to opt out of volunteering.* Do you assume all your volunteers have access to a car? Can your program provide transportation like car-pooling among volunteers? Can you get free bus or subway passes from your local public transportation service; would it be worthwhile for your agency to invest in such passes to give to eligible volunteers? Is there a way your volunteer projects could go to your volunteers instead of your volunteers coming to the project?
- ❑ *Consider the hidden costs of volunteering.* Many retired volunteers are on a fixed income. Are there costs to volunteering for your program that you might not have considered? Could one volunteer-project include getting donations of supplies for service projects: pads, pens, stamps, arts and crafts materials, copy-service, snacks?

Consider alternative ways to view your senior volunteers.

- ❑ *Don't assume that senior volunteers won't be able to volunteer for physically challenging projects or won't want to learn new skills.* Offer all your volunteers new challenges. Don't box your senior volunteers into certain types of service based on old stereotypes about the aging process.
- ❑ *Are there opportunities in your projects to get the generations together?* Intergenerational encounters can have positive outcomes for everyone involved, volunteers and clients. Is there a way to bring older adults together with young children for projects or to hook teenagers up with older volunteers, who can serve as mentors?

- ❑ *Do involve older volunteers in the process.* Odds are yours is not the first program with which they've worked or volunteered. See what insights they bring to your service projects.

Baby Boomers

Remember the statistics from the last chapter about 75% of the baby boomer generation (1946-1964) wanting more meaningful opportunities to serve society. Keep this in mind as these people transition from the workplace into retirement. “early signs show that boomers will upturn traditional notions of what it means to be old,”¹³ so developing plans now to serve the needs of this generation could be one of the most important steps your volunteer administrators take.

Students as volunteers

College students have a history of community service and involvement. Independent Sector indicates that almost half of all 18- to 24-year-olds volunteer and the percentage is rising. Yet few of our nonprofits actively recruit from the student population. In addition to the increase of required community service at colleges and universities, many academic course requirements now include a volunteer activity. Another rising trend is the community service component of local high school attendance and graduation programs. Many high schools require a mandatory number of community service hours for graduation. Also, many are using community service hours as a component of their attendance policy. Students are required to work off unexcused absences with volunteer hours. Often a specific person within the high school administration is designated to find organizations where the students can volunteer.

One of the most fruitful partnerships an agency can establish is one with a college class or department. The students are supervised by a professor or dean who helps keep them on track. There is an opportunity to get a number of costly services at a low price.

Another reason students are a growing segment of the volunteer force is interest in adding some “pork” to their resume and in learning new skills. Keep this in mind when designing student positions and projects. Also use this to your advantage by seeking to connect with students whose majors will contribute to the position, such as computer or business skills, or whose skills

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will be enhanced by the volunteer position, such as an arts major working as a docent in a museum. (See suggestions in box to follow)

PREPARING FOR STUDENTS

Before approaching a high school or university about a volunteer collaboration, you will want to ask a number of questions and begin preparing for student volunteers. It is important that you are adequately staffed, flexible in time schedules and position descriptions, financially secure, and innovative in program development before you can begin establishing the relationships needed in the educational system. Answering the following questions will help in your planning process¹⁴.

1. What particular needs do we have that could be met by student volunteers? What would be the benefits of a student volunteer program? ...for us?...for the student?...for the school or university?
2. Who would be designated on the board or staff to be responsible for the coordination efforts between the schools and our organization?
3. Is there anyone in the organization who could serve as a link to assist in approaching the school or university?
4. How can our volunteer program meet the needs of the school or academic course?
5. Can our volunteer program be flexible and innovative enough to create positions for students?
6. How would our student volunteer program fit in with the goals and objectives of the organization?
7. Will the student program be ongoing or a one-time effort?
8. Do we have the staff, board, and financial support needed to implement the program?

Some important considerations when incorporating students into your volunteer program are:

Appropriate Supervision

Matching position to student

Good Training

Make it fun!

Suggestions for recruiting student volunteers

As soon as you are prepared for student volunteers and have some positions identified and earmarked as possible student positions or projects, you are ready to actively recruit students. Use the following suggestions as you design a recruitment program.

- Contact the professor directly and ask if you can make a presentation in the class about the project or position.
- Talk to dormitory or residential advisors and ask if you can put up flyers or even go door to door.
- Post flyers in campus buildings and cafeterias. Often, tables can be set up in strategic places with information and someone to answer questions. Be sure and check with campus facility personnel first.
- Be sure and let the student know the time requirements of a position or assignment. Many students are already balancing school and work as well as social commitments.
- Ask to have articles placed in campus newspapers and other student publications.

Suggestions to Arts Organizations for Student Positions/Projects

- Students make excellent ushers/ticket takers for concerts. A student's tight budget makes ushering in exchange for a ticket appealing.
- Consider using a business student/class for an audit preparation or to help with tax reports/forms.
- Students in research classes could help with assessments or surveys.
- Art students may be able to help with educational programs for elementary schools or school art projects.
- Using theatre students in all aspects of a theatre production greatly enhances their skills and experience in the theatre.
- Visual art students could help with painting props or designing brochures/publications.

- Ask a computer major to help set up your website.
- Students are usually enthusiastic and make great fundraisers. Involve students in fundraising activities. Many participate with campus fundraising and have great ideas.
- A student with good writing skills (English Major) may be able to assist in writing and editing grants. This would be a good skill for a student to list on a resume.

Don't wait for the students to come to you, think student possibilities when you plan!

Corporate volunteers

One of the growing trends in the volunteer world is the entrance of corporate-sponsored volunteer programs. These are seen as mutually beneficial collaborations where volunteer organizations receive badly needed resources and businesses improve public image, offer community goodwill, and raise the morale of employees. Volunteerism helps companies create an ethos of service which is often brought back to the workplace and modeled. An example of these benefits is evident in the billboard campaign run by Coors Brewing Co. in the Denver area. On the billboards, Coors displays a picture of employees volunteering in their community with the headline stating simply, *"Because we live here too."*

The Conference Board in New York City and The Points of Light Foundation conducted a survey of 454 U.S. corporations which revealed that 92% of respondents encouraged employees to become involved in volunteer activities.¹⁵ According to the executives surveyed, employee skills that are enhanced by volunteer participation include:

- Communication skills, written and verbal
- Organizational and time-management skills
- People skills, such as caring, listening and negotiating
- Accountability and assessment reporting
- The ability to plan with both short- and long-term objectives
- Budgeting and allocation skills

- Survival skills, including stress management and priority setting

In addition, volunteer programs help participants acquire new attitudes about work and society, including:

- An increased understanding of co-workers and respect for diversity
- More innovative approaches in responding to difficulties
- Enhancement of calculated risk taking
- Heightened appreciation for benefits provided by employers
- Enlarged sense of community and social obligation
- Greater appreciation for contributions from all levels of the organization
- Affirmation of personal capability and worth
- Development of pride and responsibility
- Positive resistance to feelings of isolation and alienation

Many volunteer experts agree that the corporate volunteer movement is contributing to a rise of professionalism in volunteer organizations. Because of the rigidity that this professionalism produces through processes such as highly systemic training programs, certification, centralization of services termed “hardening of the arteries” by Ilsley,¹⁶ many volunteer organizations are suffering “heart attacks.” This new professionalism is said to threaten the true spirit of volunteerism as nonprofits look more to big business instead of appealing to the general public humanitarianism. However, many volunteer organizations have learned to reap the benefits of corporate volunteerism without marginalization. By being aware of both the benefits and the pitfalls of corporate involvement, your organization can successfully tap into this type of collaboration.

Some requirements for a successful collaboration with a corporate volunteer program include:

- Full support from the company CEO

- Good communication about the company's commitment to volunteerism
- A liaison who can coordinate the volunteer effort on work time
- A good match between the business and the nonprofit, i.e., editors at *Time*
- Warner provide volunteers for a literacy program or a new Target store helping with the community theatre

Diversity

Every volunteer should be considered diverse because every volunteer comes into an organization with different skills, different cultural backgrounds and unique beliefs. Too often this issue is expressed as simply “black or white.” However, for the purpose of discussion, we will consider diversity as those who are in the minority with regard to ethnicity, religious and regional differences, class, gender, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation and lifestyle. The purpose of this discussion is to value diversity and consider ways diverse volunteers can contribute and enhance the mission of your organization.¹⁷

For centuries, the arts seem to some as elitist and only enjoyed by the upper class populations. However, as we look more closely, especially at ethnic and folk arts, we realize this is not true. Good art is everywhere, in all cultures and in all classes of society. By valuing diversity, your organization can benefit by bringing new artistic perspectives.

ACCEPTING CHANGE

One of the major obstacles most organizations find when trying to promote diversity in their volunteer program is dealing with change. For most people, change can be threatening. Usually good communication and education will help people overcome their fear of change and loss of familiarity. If you are unsure of whether you need to implement a more diverse program, ask yourselves the question, “Does our volunteer staff and board represent the diversity within our community?” Consider the example of the Skylight Opera Theatre in Milwaukee, WI. “The Skylight Board—formerly 100 percent Caucasian and only partially representative of its traditional market area—ultimately broke its cycle of recruiting friends, neighbors, and co-workers by attending cultural events and celebrations and making genuine

connections throughout the Milwaukee community. Skylight now has a board that is 11 percent representative of its target communities.”¹⁸

The future success of voluntary organizations will depend in large part on how different value systems can be incorporated into programs and in how well we can help new groups of people with the acculturation process.

Ivan H. Scheier

Some Suggestions for Promoting Diversity

- Assess the community you serve and make a list of cultural and other diverse groups. Use this list during strategic planning, recruitment planning and when considering new board members.
- If you include the paid staff and other volunteers in diversity planning, as well as the board, you will minimize fears and encourage commitment.
- Spend some time educating the staff, volunteers, and board about diversity, i.e., if you want to include a particular ethnic group, do some research, find out about the cultural values and make a presentation.
- Include minority speakers at any training conferences or events.
- Consider a diversity event where you can invite representatives from local diversity groups to talk about their culture or unique contributions. For example, have some ethnic groups represented as well as the local veterans and people with disabilities.
- Consider setting up a special task force or committee with a board member as chair to manage the process of increasing diversity.
- Devote a portion of your newsletter to publicize any success stories you have had reaching diverse groups of people.
- Anticipate problems early and make any changes that may be necessary to deal with diverse populations, i.e. if you are going to ask a physically handicapped person to help in a building, make sure the building has proper, safe access for the person or if you are asking someone to volunteer who only speaks a foreign language, you will want someone who is bilingual available to help with language barriers.

- Collaborate with other agencies and community organizations. They may be having an event that you can help with and both of you reap the benefits.
- ASK!!

Consider the following actual examples taken from an “On Volunteers” column in The Nonprofit Times, by Susan J. Ellis.

A juvenile detention center recruited physically disabled volunteers because it found that people in wheelchairs were able to confront teenage lawbreakers about making choices in more positive ways.

A nursing home opened an after-school homework center for latchkey children at a nearby elementary school. It was hard to determine which age group was the most “served” by the interaction.

A park started a weekend campground patrol program by recruiting families to volunteer at specific camp sites for 48-hour shifts. The multi-generational volunteers proved to be effective role models for the weekend campers.

On the next page, you will find a worksheet to help you incorporate some of these ideas and others you may discover during this process into your existing volunteer program.

Volunteers “A La Carte”

In the 2003 April-June issue of *eVolunteerism*, Steve McCurley and Susan Ellis ask the question, “Are We Using the Wrong Model for Volunteer Work?”¹⁹ Many of us are programmed to believe that long-term volunteers are the best model out there and we build our programs around them. In this article, Steve and Susan point out that we may want to reexamine our approach and consider thinking of volunteers as ‘something like consultants.’ Look for creative new approaches to volunteers and programs to better meet the needs of the current trends. Michael Lee Stills, Editor-in-Chief of *Volunteer Management Review* suggests the following definitions you may have

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encountered but seldom considered as different ways of looking at your program:

LONG TERM (YEAR ROUND) VOLUNTEER

Terms like Classic and Traditional come to mind. These volunteers have been the staples of volunteer management for many years. In fact, we have come to rely upon these volunteers as we would any paid staff. Thus the term “unpaid” staff. When we engage in discussion about volunteers we most often are thinking of these types of volunteers.

EPISODIC VOLUNTEER

You are probably receiving more calls from these folks than any other type of volunteer request. Time is short for all of us these days, and these volunteers want to come in, do some quick good, and get out. They may repeat this a few times throughout the year, but don’t ask them to commit to anything of real length.

PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEER

These are the people who we forget about involving in our programs. Unfortunately, many still think of volunteers as unskilled labor. If you hear a LOV saying, “I can recruit just about anyone to do just about anything,” they likely have not considered the involvement of highly skilled personnel who will give their time; given the right circumstances and resources. In fact, doctors, lawyers, information technologists, and management professionals among other regularly volunteer their skills to organizations properly prepared to accept them.

SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEER

Those of you in emergency and disaster services know about Spontaneous Volunteers. These are extremely good-hearted people who show up out of nowhere and everywhere to help in times of need. It is impossible to apply Long-Term techniques to these folks. Many are turned away because organizations are not prepared or have not considered how to take advantage of these potential resources.

STIPEND VOLUNTEER

AmeriCorps provides probably the best-known use of Stipend volunteers. These volunteers receive a small amount of money to volunteer. It is not

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enough to live on but may help overcome burdens or barriers to volunteering or provide educational benefits. Many may volunteer for long-term assignments, but understanding the motivations and legalities if their involvement sets them apart from the more traditional long-term volunteers.

SERVICE-LEARNING VOLUNTEER

Service-Learning Volunteers burst onto the scene among the debates over requiring middle and high school students to volunteer. Soon organizations were flooded with requests like, “I need 20 hours of volunteering by next week.” Many organizations quickly developed programs to engage and enrich the experience of today’s youth and teenage volunteers. Although your organization may get some significant work done, the focus is more on the experience of the volunteer and less on the mission.

COURT APPOINTED VOLUNTEER

There are two basic models involving Court Appointed Volunteers. One has a completely separate process of involving them the other incorporates them directly into exist volunteer opportunities and does not openly distinguish them from other volunteers. Blindly following your established Long-Term practices will likely get you into trouble here if you don’t have an open discussion with staff about how to best fit them in your program.

VOLUNTEER BOARD MEMBERS

Are they volunteers or not? Some say yes and actively include them in their volunteer program. Others say no, and avoid their involvement at all costs. Many work them in the middle with a cautious eye. Obviously they are often treated different than your classic volunteer. Ask yourself and others in your organization, “why is this?” The answers will start you on the way to reexamining your program.

Steve and Susan ask us to rethink the traditional way we have been thinking of volunteers and to think of volunteers as being like consultants. In their words as, “paid specialists who are retained to perform short-term projects, events, or activities. These are people whose work has a defined beginning, middle, end and desired outcome, people who know what they’re getting into and how long it’s going to take.”

DIVERSITY WORKSHEET

Volunteer Segment	Ways our organization may want to tap into this	Possible benefits of doing this
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	resource	
Seniors		
Students		
Corporate Volunteers		
Diverse Cultures: Others:		